

Cross Cultural and Demographic Differences in Stages of Moral Development in IT Ethics Context: Comparing US and China

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Introduction

Though not as technologically advanced as the United States, China's ICT (information and communication technology) has made great progress in the last decade and China now has the largest Internet user base in the world. This study compares how US and Chinese subjects execute ethical reasoning in technological situations and how traditional values have impacted ethical decision making.

Theoretical Framework Lawrence Kohlberg:

Lawrence Kohlberg developed a series of stages of moral development that have been used to describe various groups within a society. The first level of development is the pre-conventional stage. Within this level people generally tend to judge morality by the actions direct consequences and is mostly concerned with themselves. This first level consists of stage 1 (obedience and punishment driven) and stage 2 (self interest driven). The second level of development is the conventional stage. People within this level are generally characterized by acceptance of societal conventions of right and wrong. The individual will obey all rules and regulations despite the fact that there may not be a consequence for obedience or disobedience. The second level consists of stage 3 (interpersonal accord and conformity driven) and stage 4 (authority and social order disobedience driven). The final developmental level of Kohlberg's theory is the post-conventional. People in this final level are considered to be separate entities from society and they put themselves before others. They view rules as useful but ideally things that can be changed to maintain social order and protect human rights. The stages within this final level are stage 5 (social contract driven) and stage 6 (universal ethical principles driven).

SOURCE: KOHLBERG, (1965, 1981)		
Kohlberg's Levels of Moral Development		
LEVEL	STAGE	CHARACTERISTICS OF STAGE/LEVEL
A Preconventional	Stage 1	PUNISHMENT-OBEDIENCE ORIENTATION
	Stage 2	INSTRUMENTAL RELATIVIST ORIENTATION
B Conventional	Stage 3	INTERPERSONAL CONCORDANCE ORIENTATION
	Stage 4	AUTHORITY AND SOCIAL-ORDER MAINTAINING ORIENTATION
C Postconventional Autonomous, or Principled	Stage 5	SOCIAL-CONTRACT LEGALISTIC ORIENTATION
	Stage 6	UNIVERSAL ETHICAL PRINCIPLE ORIENTATION

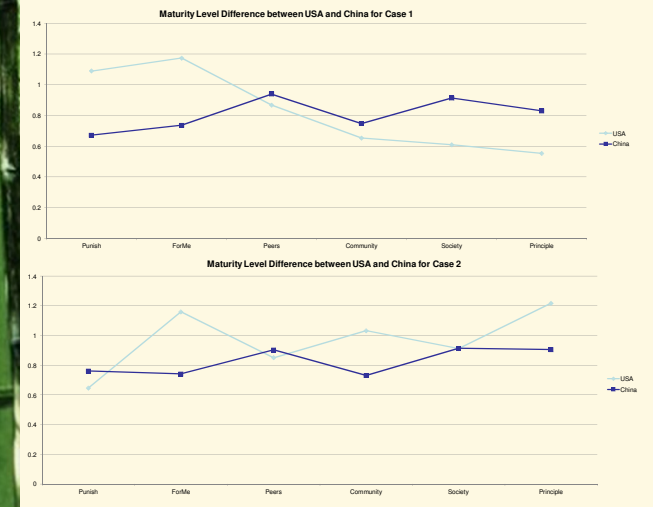
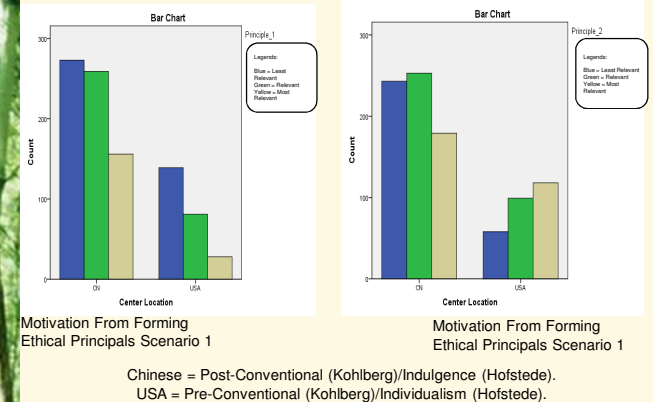
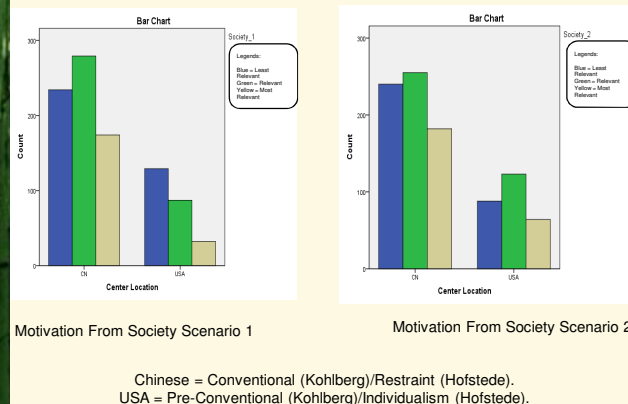
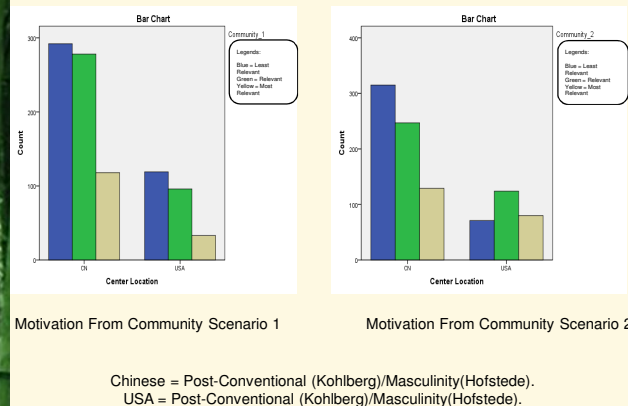
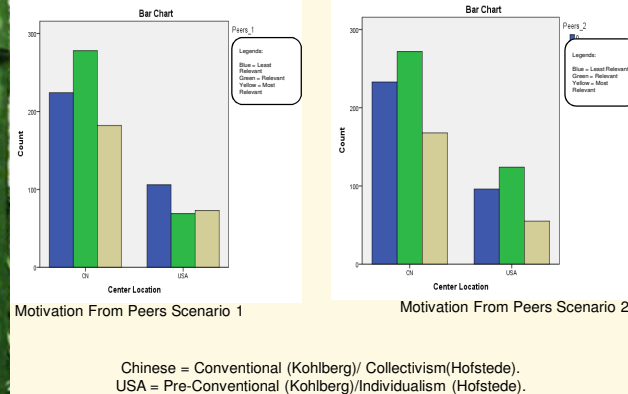
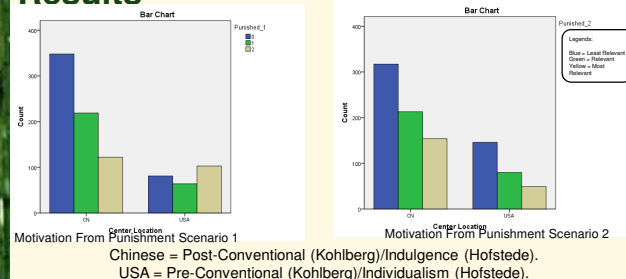
Geert Hofstede:

According to Geert Hofstede, society can be broken down into different relationships that describe it's basic "maturity" levels. There are six different relationships that Hofstede studied within his research model: Power Distance, Individualism v. Collectivism, Masculinity v. Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term v. Short Term Orientation, and Indulgence v. Restraint. Each of these relationships can visually be seen in the following graphs which also demonstrate Kohlberg's stages of development.

Methodology

A survey was administered online to subjects both from the United States and China. There were two scenarios within each survey that asked various questions about ethics in the work place. The students surveyed within the United States attended the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and took the course IS 310 between the years 2009 and 2011. The Chinese students who were surveyed attended five different universities that were visited by our research group between May and June of 2011. Data was gathered through a cross tabulation process that was then analyzed by the team who administered the survey with the help of Eau Claire faculty member Dr. Bruce Lo.

Results



Conclusion

This study demonstrated how American and Chinese subjects perform ethical reasoning in technological situations. The American society appears to remain within the Pre-Conventional level of Kohlberg's theory and view the world as it relates to themselves individually rather than a society as a whole. The Chinese, on the other hand, tend to remain within the Conventional level of Kohlberg's theory and view the world as it relates to the community as a whole rather than themselves as individuals. This study also demonstrated Hofstede's theory by revealing Americans tend to remain within an individualistic society while the Chinese tend to remain within a community based society. This is important to understand because it shows how people react given different ethical situations based on where they are from and the ethics that are generally practiced around them. These results are extremely important in moving forward with understanding how cultures around the world relate to each other in a world that is becoming ever more connected through various forms of technology and business advances.